



Cache River State Natural Area



Address: 930 Sunflower Lane, Belknap, IL 62908 618-634-9678

Site Classification: State Natural Area, 14,489 total acres, Land: 11,062 acres, Water: 3427 acres

Staffing: 3 full time employees, Site Superintendent, Site Technician, Natural Resource Co-ordinator, 12 man-months Conservation Worker(Seasonal workers), 12 man-months AmeriCorps volunteer .

Divided into two management units: Upper Cache River/ Little Black Slough - 8,318 acres
Lower Cache River - 6,171 acres

Huntable acreage: 11,946 acres

Dedicated Nature Preserve: 2188 acres and 354 acres restricted-No Hunting

Attendance: 203,910

Cache River State Natural Area offers a wide diversity of habitats, including wetlands, flood plain and upland forests and limestone barrens (prairie like communities).

The area is nationally significant because it contains true southern swamps at the northern tier of their range. The Cache River Wetlands are designated Wetlands of International Importance, a "Ramsar Site". Only 1 of 22 in the entire U.S. At last count this area contained 100 threatened and endangered species.

The main objective of Cache River State Natural Area is to preserve, protect and enhance the natural resources while providing the opportunity for quality outdoor recreation. Activities include hiking, canoeing, birdwatching, nature viewing, fishing, hunting and outdoor education opportunities.

Critical habitat is managed and restored to preserve and protect endangered, threatened and rare plants and animals. Eleven State Champion trees are found on the area.

The areas many different plant species range from impressive stands of cypress and tupelo swamps, to drummonds red maples, pumpkin ash, overcup oak, pin oak and swamp white oak common to flood plain forests. The surrounding hills have such species as tulip trees, sweetgums, spicebush and many oaks and hickories native to Southern Illinois. Little bluestem, side oats grama, big bluestem, prairie dock and Indian grass can be seen on the limestone barrens. Birding and other wildlife observations are excellent. Great blue heron, green herons, egrets, prothonotary warblers and many sparrow species are found here. Pileated woodpeckers, black and turkey vultures are encountered, as are many species of waterfowl.

Various mammals include red and gray foxes, gray and fox squirrels, mink, muskrat, beaver, swamp and cottontail rabbits, coyotes and deer live within the natural area. On rare occasions bobcats and otter are seen.

Channel catfish, bullheads, bowfin, sunfish, crappie and bass are common. Other rare aquatic species include green tree frog, bird-voiced tree frog, cypress minnow and gar.

Also notable are the three venomous snakes found in extreme southern Illinois: the copperhead, the timber rattler, and the cottonmouth.

Recreational opportunities:

There are over 20 miles of designated foot trails in the Cache River State Natural Area. They range from an easy 250-foot flood plain forest trail to a more challenging 5.5 mile trail - Little Black Slough Trail.

Some of the highlights along the footpaths include a 1,000 year old bald Cypress tree with a buttress circumference of over 40 feet, a floating boardwalk into the middle of Heron Pond - cypress swamp, Section 8 Woods boardwalk and viewing the state champion cherrybark oak tree. The Lower Cache River canoe trail offers paddlers a quality 3-6 mile canoe trail through a true cypress-tupelo swamp. Private canoe tours are available.

The Henry N. Barkhausen-Cache River Wetlands Center, a new visitor center, is currently open Wednesday through Sunday, 9am - 4pm., 618-657-2064. The Barkhausen Wetlands Center links to the Tunnel Hill State bike trail, which is 47.5 miles, starting in Harrisburg, IL and proceeds south to the Wetlands Center.